Washington State / SHARES 2026 Catastrophic Communications Exercise

After-Action Report & Improvement Plan

Alachua County ARES(R)
Gainesville, FL
Oct 30 2026

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DEDICATION

This text is dedicated to all the leaders who made it possible to hold the 2019 Amateur Radio Emergency Communications Conference.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks very much to the Washington State EM dept and the SHARES team nationally for coordinating this exercise and inviting local groups to participate as well. .

1 EXERCISE OVERVIEW

EXERCISE DOCUMENTS

Document	URL
Local Exercise Plan	https://www.nf4rc.club/historical-exercises/2026-washington-state-shares-catastrophic-communications-exercise-exercise-plan/
Announcement to ARES members	First discussion of upcoming exercise: Oct 6 2026 https://groups.io/g/NF4RC/message/11973 [unclear if discussed at October Meeting] Oct 21 2026 https://groups.io/g/NF4RC/message/12081 Oct 27 2026 -- announcement over ARES Thursday night net Post on our Web Page with Exercise Plan - Oct 27 2026

EXERCISE SCENARIO

A cascading cyber-attack of unknown origin has effectively shut down local power and communications, affecting E911, law enforcement, emergency first responders and hospitals. The exact size, scope and effect on local government and citizens is unknown. The purpose and source of the attack are unknown. The normal methods of determining the size and scope of the event are either unavailable or unreliable. Amateur radio operators within the community are able to provide jurisdictional and state emergency management agencies with situational awareness, allowing policy and planning sections to better respond to the presenting situation.

At 0900 hours local time, your neighborhood experienced a power outage. Both landline and cellular phones are inoperable. You attempt to check in on local VHF/UHF ham repeaters only to find a number of them are off the air due to the lack of commercial power. When you tune into local commercial radio stations for news about the blackout, most of the radio stations are down due to the lack of commercial power.

When power does not come back on by 0930 hours, you decide to engage emergency power to your radio station and home (generator/ battery/ solar) and send in a Field Situation Report to your local emergency management agency and the state emergency operations center in the manner prescribed by your local agency

2 TASKS

1. Between 1000 - 1200 LOCAL TIME, preferably as early as possible -- activate your amateur radio station using your own callsign. Bring up WINLINK. Allow any updates to proceed that you need to do. (If you are able to proceed on alternative power, that is even better!)
2. Initiate a new message: Click on MESSAGE | New Message Your message type will be "Send as Winlink Message" (which is the regular type)
3. Click to use a TEMPLATE to form your message
4. Select the "Standard Forms"; go down to Washington State, and select their FIELD STATUS REPORT
5. When that comes up, indicate that you wish to send it to SHARES callsign NNA4UK (our Alachua county EOC callsign) and also copy it to NF4AC (our Alachua EOC Radio Club callsign)..
6. Your Served Agency is ALACHUA COUNTY EOC.
7. At the very bottom of the report, for the APPROVED BY entry, put THIS IS AN EXERCISE for the entry.
8. Fill in the report with made-up disastrous things not working, to your heart's content!
9. SUBMIT the report when you are finished.
10. POST it to the Outbox so it is then ready to send.
11. Then make any type of WINLINK connection that you can and send the report in: First Preference: use RADIO, either HF or VHF (either VARA or Packet) to any RMS that you can connect to. Because of the way the Central Message Servers work, your message will successfully make it to our SHARES callsign. Second Preference: If you cannot connect to a radio message server (RMS) then use TELNET.

3 RESULTS

This exercise, created in Washington State, was a bit late in providing details to remote groups. Although our first discussion of this upcoming exercise was on our groups.io forum on October 6th, no one had a real write up even of the Washington State exercise at that point; I was waiting for an email with more details.

The monthly SHARES Working Group meeting on Friday October 23 featured a good discussion of this Exercise, at which time, I concluded our team could well participate as a "local" group. This would not require decision-making by our Emergency Management department.

Subsequent to that I created local documents, and provided them to our "Net Control Team" on Tuesday October 27th, with a complete Exercise Plan, available as a PDF on our web page. That allowed for it to be further announced on our Thursday evening Net October 29--just the evening before the exercise. That didn't give our team much advance notice, more than about 14 hours. However, a catastrophic communications outage such as what was in the exercise would have virtually ZERO pre announcement.

OVERALL PARTICIPATION RESULTS			
Time	**Call Sign of Winlink account checked for emails**	**New Messages Downloaded**	**Comments**
0900 10/30/26	KX4Z	0	pre-exercise
0900 10/30/26	NNA4UK	0	pre-exercise
1100 10/30/26	KX4Z	0 (note message from KI4OXD)	NOTE: KI4OXD replied to the group text message via Winlink indicating he was at work and unable to participate.
1100 10/20/26	NNA4UK	KX4Z / 3513 NH2KW 3755 KZ4KC 3614	Tom Warren's message went it as "flash" and was picked up and answered by Brett.

		KC8DHX	
1200 10/30/26	KX4Z	Nothing new	
1200 10/30/26	NNA4UK	Nothing new	(Brett downloaded a submission from NH2HWN) --
1300	KX4Z	K4MVR	Another input!
1300	NNA4UK	Nothing new	

I created text message instructions for the Exercise and send them out on the day prior to the exercise via WINLINK, which allowed me to find out which members of our team actually have a Winlink account. Just over 60% do have an account, a higher number than I would have expected, but missing several key leadership.

Participation in the exercise was graded as anyone who sent in a WINLINK message, even if they were at work and unable to participate in the main effort.

Subsequent to the Exercise, I sent the result out, which allowed me to measure whether any of the members of the team had followed the directions to add a Winlink account, if they didn't have one; the result was that zero persons activated an account.

				10/29/26pre exercise	**EXERCISE Day**	**10/30/26 post exercise**
PRE	**SUFX**	**NAME**	**CITY**	**winlink acct**	**participated**	**winlink acct**
WA4	AMY	Amy	Trenton	NO		NO
W5	APO	Bob	Gainesville			
KC8	DHX	Tom	Gainesville		YES	
WB2	FKO	Michael	High Springs			
W4	GHP	Pete	Gainesville	NO		NO
W4	GJ	Bob Lightner	Gainesville	NO		NO
KR4	HMP	Scott Crosby	Gainesville	NO		NO
N2	HWN	Ryan	Newberry			
KN4	IIM	Hugh	Gainesville			
KK4	INZ	Craig	Gainesville			
WA4	JD	Allan	Gainesville	NO		NO
K4	JRM	John Maxwell	High Springs			
KI4	KEA	Jim B.	Gainesville			
KZ4	KC	Manish	Gainesville		YES	
NH2	KW	Brett W.	Alachua		YES	

KK4	MAC	Mac	Newberry	NO		NO
KC4	MHH	Jim	Gainesville	NO		NO
KI4	OXD	Earl Sloan	Hawthorne		message	
K9	PDL	Susan T.	Gainesville	NO		NO
KI4	QBZ	Rosemary	Gainesville			
KD0	QIX	Barry	Gainesville			
AC4	QS	Vann	Gainesville			
K9	RFT	Reid	Gainesville			
KV4	RL	Dean	Gainesville	NO		NO
WB2	SVB	Larry	Gainesville	NO		NO
N4	TEK	Mark	Gainesville	NO		NO
W4	UFL	Jeff	Gainesville	NO		NO
KG4	VWI	Susan H.	Archer			
KF4	WQJ	John D.	Hawthorne	NO		NO
KX4	Z	Gordon	Newberry		YES	
KO4	ZRZ	Craig	Gainesville			
K4	ZSW	Earl McDow	Gainesville			
KN4	ZUJ	Ron	Alachua			
					5/33	
				60.60% with Winlink	15.% participation	60.60% with Winlink
						no change

4 EXERCISE CATEGORIZATION

Exercise Name	Catastrophic Communications Exercise 2026
Exercise Dates	10/30/26
Scope	This is a nationwide communications exercise involving federal, state, county, tribal and city emergency management agencies, critical infrastructure/partners, SHARES Auxiliary members and local amateur radio operators not directly affiliated with one of these served agencies. The level of individual participation is determined locally by jurisdictional emergency management authorities
Mission Area(s)	Response
Core Capabilities	Operational Communications
Objectives	Ability to understand directions Ability to create and send a Washington State Field Situation Report by WINLINK
Threat or Hazard	Cyber-attack and communications assets and energy
Scenario	A cascading cyber-attack of unknown origin has effectively shut down local power and communications, affecting E911, law enforcement, emergency first responders and hospitals. The exact size, scope and effect on local government and citizens is unknown. The purpose and source of the attack are unknown. The normal methods of determining the size and scope of the event are either unavailable or unreliable. Amateur radio operators within the community are able to provide jurisdictional and state emergency management agencies with situational awareness, allowing policy and planning sections to better respond to the presenting situation.
Sponsor	**Washington Military Department Emergency Management Division Logistics Program (WA EMD)**
Participating Organizations	Washington State Emergency Management Multiple additional communications teams and Emergency Management agencies across the USA

Exercise Name	Catastrophic Communications Exercise 2026
Point of Contact	Gordon Gibby MD KX4Z

5 ANALYSIS OF CORE CAPABILITIES

Objective	Core Capability	Performed without Challenges (P)	Performed with Some Challenges (S)	Performed with Major Challenges (M)	Unable to be Performed (U)
Ability to understand Directions	Operational Communications.		**S**		
Ability to create and transmit WINLINK Washington State Field Situation report	Function in an ICS Framework			**M**	

Table 1. Summary of Core Capability Performance

Ratings Definitions:

Performed without Challenges (P): The targets and critical tasks associated with the core capability were completed in a manner that achieved the objective(s) and did not negatively impact the performance of other activities. Performance of this activity did not contribute to additional health and/or safety risks for the public or for emergency workers, and it was conducted in accordance with applicable plans, policies, procedures, regulations, and laws.

Performed with Some Challenges (S): The targets and critical tasks associated with the core capability were completed in a manner that achieved the objective(s) and did not negatively impact the performance of other activities. Performance of this activity did not contribute to additional health and/or safety risks for the public or for emergency workers, and it was conducted in accordance with applicable plans, policies, procedures, regulations, and laws. However, opportunities to enhance effectiveness and/or efficiency were identified.

Performed with Major Challenges (M): The targets and critical tasks associated with the core capability were completed in a manner that achieved the objective(s), but some or all of the following were observed: demonstrated performance had a negative impact on the performance of other activities; contributed to additional health and/or safety risks for the public or for emergency workers; and/or was not conducted in accordance with applicable

plans, policies, procedures, regulations, and laws.

Unable to be Performed (U): The targets and critical tasks associated with the core capability were not performed in a manner that achieved the objective(s).

The following sections provide an overview of the performance related to each exercise objective and associated core capability, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement.

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Objective: Ability to read directions and understand

The strengths and areas for improvement for each core capability aligned to this objective are described in this section.

Core Capability: Operational Communications

Strengths

The partial capability level can be attributed to the following strengths:

Strength 1: Multiple means of communicating Exercise information -- information was provided by email to our Net Control Stations; by front page posting on our web page, and by our groups.io page.

Areas for Improvement

The following areas require improvement to achieve the full capability level:

Area for Improvement 1: More advance notice. This exercise information wasn't received until mid October by the author and this delayed creation of local exercise plans.

Objective: Ability to compose and send a Washington State Field Status Report

The strengths and areas for improvement for each core capability aligned to this objective are described in this section.

Core Capability: Operational Communications

Strengths

The partial capability level can be attributed to the following strengths:

Strength 1: We've been teaching these techniques for a decade now, and incorporating them in the ARRL Board of Directors' required ARES TRAINING PLAN.

Areas for Improvement

The following areas require improvement to achieve the full capability level:

Area for Improvement 1: Still, a large percent of local ARES(R) participants do not have current WINLINK capabilities.

Area for Improvement 2: Some of our ARES(R) members still have jobs, and this unavoidably limits their ability tot keep up and participate during working hours -- the hours that are most important for government efforts.

Area for Improvement 1: A good number of our participants still do not have ability to send a radio message.

6 IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Item	Core Capability	Area For Improvement	Corrective Action	Suggested Primary Organization	Outcome (FILL IN AS REPORTED)
1	Core Communications	More advance notifications	Little we can do here, as we didn't get final information from Washington state until late.	SHARES	
2	Core Communications	More local readership of announcements		Local members	
3	Core Communictions	Increased % of ARES participants with WINLINK accounts.	Additional training	ARES	
4	Core Communictions	Increased participation		ARES	